

NOT THE RIGHTEOUS!

ADAPTED FROM PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION'S RADIO SERIES, "UNSHACKLED!"

by Jack Odell

"For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" Matthew 9:13

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Chapter 3

Scotty Lawrence . . . who played GOD

"GENTLEMEN, I CAN WRITE A COMPLETE SONG, WORDS AND music, in twenty minutes."

Scott Lawrence was holding court in a gas-lit barroom, surrounded by a thirsty entourage of hangers-on. The oak table was round, but it clearly had a head. That was where Scott Lawrence sat.

Scotty was monarch of New York's song writers and looked the part. He was the prototype of all the vagabond kings and student princes that have ever smiled across the footlights. Also, Scott Lawrence was drunk.

He was drunk, but not out of control. In those days he was never out of control; always self-possessed, and possessed with self. Loss of control lay ahead in the days of, "The king is dead." Tonight the courtiers were shouting, "Long live the king," and Scotty loved it.

He pounded the table for silence.

"I said it, and I mean it, and I can do it. I can write a complete song, words and music, in twenty minutes!"

While they laughed and protested he finished his drink. "And what's more, it'll be a big one. They'll sing it all over the country!"

A rival songwriter stood up to call Scotty's bluff. "Scotty, you're good, but you're not that good. I say, 'put your money where your mouth is!'"

That brought out the wallets and money. Laughing delightedly, Scotty produced a roll of green backs and peeled it with a moistened thumb.

"Did someone mention ten to one?"

Money began fluttering onto the table, and the bluff was called.

Scott Lawrence lit a fresh cigar, poured himself another drink, and sat down at an empty table with a big gold watch ticking away the time. His only tools were a sharpened pencil, the back of a theater program, and matchless self-assurance.

Twenty minutes later he had a half-chewed cigar, an empty glass, and the manuscript of America's latest hit song. Also, his self-assurance was completely intact.

A song plugger took the manuscript to the piano while Scotty pocketed his winnings. Two minutes later the plugger gave the saloon audience a premier performance of, *"I'll Never Be Good Enough."*

No one noticed that Scott Lawrence was wearing his heart on his sleeve.

There has always been something especially dramatic about a really good woman's love for a dissolute man. It gives her a tragic luster and turns out the lint pockets of his character.

The name of the girl in this story was Victoria Barnes.

Vicky had no illusions about Scott Lawrence. She saw him with clear eyes and heard the clink of his counterfeit character, and still she loved him. And so, of course, she always would.

Scott Lawrence loved Victoria second to none in this world with the exception of Scott Lawrence.

"I'll Never Be Good Enough" grew to hit proportions.

Victoria knew, of course, that it was written for her. But she wasn't fooled by the hollow self-pity of the title. She pretended not to notice, and this forced Scotty into the open. Typically, his campaign centered around Scott Lawrence.

Victoria had been running through a group of old songs at her piano. When she stopped playing, Scotty spoke.

"Vicky, why don't you play something new? What about *'I'll Never Be Good Enough'*?"

Victoria smiled and said nothing.

"It's written by a very successful reprobate named Scott Lawrence. Ever hear of him?"

"Yes," she said. "I love him."

"Then why keep me at arm's length? I believe you love me, Vicky, but you're so cold. Why aren't you more like I am? You don't even speak my language, Vic. You're too . . . too good."

She turned to face him. "Scotty, do you honestly want me to change? Do you really want me to come over to your side?"

He couldn't answer that.

"Would you still love me as much - if I changed?" Still he said nothing.

"Scotty - will you answer me?"

Somehow, he told the truth.

"No, Vie. No, I wouldn't."

Then he grabbed for the self-deception that has launched so many unhappy marriages.

"You can change me, Vicky. Marry me, and you can make me like - like you are. You can change me, Vicky!"

It's a fiction that few women have ever been able to resist. It has the shape of love, the fabric of mercy, and the color of hope. Victoria sat quietly in her own little wilderness, hardly knowing what to pray for. Fragments of a sentence fluttered in her mind. "**Get thee hence; for it is written . . .**" She had her answer.

"No, Scotty - I can't. That's what you won't seem to understand. Only GOD can change you."

"Leave Him out of it. That's one thing I don't have to put up with!"

"Scotty, listen." She was suddenly close to tears. "GOD is love - and He wants us together. But He knows you and I can never be happy as long as you're playing GOD, too. There can't be two Gods in one home, Scotty. It just won't work!"

Scotty's pride had a choice. It could resist or it could bend. And because it wouldn't bend, he rejected the thing he loved.

"You win, Vicky." He stood up. "I can see it won't work. You've made it very clear, my dear. Suddenly I believe it won't work."

Even then she still tried.

"We can have a beautiful life, Scotty. But you've got to turn to GOD. You need Him. GOD loves you - and so do I."

Scotty was furious. "He doesn't love me - and I don't need Him! I'll still be my own god, Victoria, and I'll prove to you that it works. I don't need anybody - not even you!"

He stormed out. Victoria Barnes, on her knees beside the piano bench, did the only thing that was left to do. She prayed.

During the years that followed, Victoria kept up with Scotty's progress through the theatrical papers. He did well for a long time, touring the country as an arranger and song writer with the top vaudeville acts of the day. The stack of songs with "words and music by Scott Lawrence"

grew taller and taller on her piano.

When Scotty thought of Victoria, it was always in terms of his injured pride. If his heart was broken, one fragment pumped self-esteem and the other self-pity. Together they beat for Scott Lawrence.

The self-worshiper faces one great danger. He may eventually get a candid, revealing view of his deity. There's a traditional solution, and Scotty used it. He hid his one man holy of holies behind an alcoholic veil. When that screen dissolved in the light of too many mornings-after, he reinforced it with cocaine.

With the years, Vicky found fewer and fewer Scott Lawrence tunes to add to her collection. Finally, they stopped appearing at all. The king was professionally dead.

As his name dropped out of the theatrical papers, Scotty dropped out of sight below the police deadline in Chicago. There on the old Levee Scotty pounded pianos to pay for the whiskey and dope that held him together.

Through the years Victoria waited and prayed. When Scotty disappeared, she tried to reach out by setting a net of prayer. She asked the rescue missions in New York to pray regularly for Scott Lawrence. They in turn passed the request on to missions all over the country. For ten years Scotty's name was forgotten everywhere - except in mission prayer meetings.

He knew nothing of all this, for a mission was the last place he intended to go. As a member of the sizeable cult of self-worship he needed first to reach a sort of special atheism and lose faith in himself. After that he could look up and discover that GOD had been waiting all the time.

There's a definite mark in Scott Lawrence's history at the point where he lost faith in his own deity.

On that day, stooped and ragged and shaking, he shuffled into one of Chicago's biggest department stores and openly lifted an expensive handbag from one of the counters. He was purposely attracting as much attention as possible. A store detective caught him, of course.

While they waited for the wagon, the detective said, "What's the matter with you bums, anyway? You might know you'd wind up in the clink."

Then and there Scott Lawrence recanted his faith in Scott Lawrence.

"That's what I'm hopin' for. Because outside of jail - I'm hopeless!"

He served six months in the Bridewell prison. Faith in self was gone, and he'd found no other faith to replace it. When he came out of jail, he was too much of a wreck to be accepted even below the deadline. The night came when, lying on two broken boxes in an alley under a drenching rain, he thought he'd reached the end.

There in that filth-littered alley, the phantoms in his brain began talking to him. They used the voice of the woman he had walked out on years before. Words filtered back out of the past.

"We can have a beautiful life, Scotty. But you've got to turn to GOD."

He whimpered softly.

"Scotty, you need Him. GOD loves you - and so do I." The man crawled to his feet and stumbled toward the mouth of the alley, water running in and out of his broken shoes.

"GOD loves you, Scotty."

He struggled to move faster, running raggedly toward the lights of the street.

"Oh, GOD - I'm losing my mind!"

The doors of the Pacific Garden Mission have never closed, but at one o'clock on that rainy night the chapel was quiet. Ma Taylor, wife of the superintendent, was dimming the lights as Scott Lawrence, tattered and dripping, came stumbling in.

She led him to a bench and sat quietly as he told his story. When he gave his name, she said, "Oh, praise GOD," and stopped him.

"This is an answer to more prayers than you'll ever know about."

Scotty was puzzled. "Prayers, ma'am?"

"Thousands of prayers. Missions in Chicago and New York and I don't know how many other cities have been praying for Scott Lawrence for ten years!"

"Praying for me? Why?"

"Because someone asked for prayer. The request was sent around the New York missions first. Then it was passed along to us."

Tears rose in Scotty's bloodshot eyes. He slowly put the information together as he faltered, "Requests for prayer from New York?"

"I don't know who made the request, but . . ." "I know." Then, "I'm here - what do I do?"

There was only one real answer, of course. Ma Taylor talked to Scotty about JESUS, and she was led to emphasize "He loves you."

At last she said, "Do you believe JESUS really came out of that tomb and is alive now and willing to save you from yourself, if you'll let Him?"

Bruised and battered, Scotty's ego still resisted. "Do I believe that?"

"I didn't say 'do you understand it?' I'm asking, 'Do you believe that CHRIST can straighten out your life?'"

"I should, ma'am, because I've been proven wrong. And I've been trying to play GOD - in my own life."

Ma Taylor smiled as she answered, "That's the best definition of sin I've heard in a long time."

Together they read, **"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."**

And Scotty received JESUS CHRIST into his life.

But an ego like his doesn't surrender easily. That rainy night began Scotty's most violent time of conflict. He shuttled between alternate spells of sobriety and saturation. The pattern was standard: rebellion, intoxication, and then remorse and prayer at Pacific Garden Mission. A sober interlude followed, and then rebellion and the full cycle again. Mrs. Taylor patiently worked and prayed with him when others gave up.

During one of the times of remorse she said, "Scotty, do you feel as though you're still hunting for something - something you haven't found?"

"I don't know how you knew, but you're right."

"If you feel unsatisfied," Ma Taylor went on, "it's because you don't belong to CHRIST. You need to stop trying on your own strength and really surrender yourself."

"Surrender?"

"That's the word. You have JESUS CHRIST, But He doesn't have you."

He thought that over and Mrs. Taylor went on.

"Tell me, Scotty, what do you keep going back out there for? What's out there on the street?"

"Nothing, ma'am. There's really nothing out there."

"Then let go of 'nothing' and give yourself all the way to Him. He loves you, Scotty. And you need Him."

These were Victoria's own words. "He loves you. You need Him."

This time they penetrated - to stay.

The following morning a very different Scott Lawrence sat at the Mission piano, working out new melodies that needed to be heard.

Scotty's talents were free to flow again, but they flowed for the glory of his new Lord. Within months his gospel songs were echoing coast to coast, from one mission chapel to another.

Once sure of his new freedom, Scotty followed the trail of an old prayer request back to New York City. He was unable to find Victoria, but while he searched he kept on writing songs and speaking at prayer meetings and revivals.

One of Scotty's new songs was, "*Whisper A Prayer*." It was introduced in a big New York auditorium. When the music ended, he was called from the audience to the platform.

As he started down the aisle a tall, slender woman rose from a seat near the front and came up the same aisle toward him.

"Scotty - I was afraid to wait until after the service. I'd hate to lose you again!"

Holding hands like children, Victoria went up to the platform with him.

They had five wonderful years of married life and then one day Victoria wrote a long letter to Mrs. Walter G. Taylor at Chicago's Pacific Garden Mission. It began this way:

Yes, Scott has gone home. But during the five years we worked together among underprivileged children here in New York City, my Scotty more than made good. His going was as sweet and quiet as a baby falling asleep.

And the letter ended:

When you feel discouraged there at the Mission and the results seem hopeless, please remember Scott and gain new courage. Whatever you do, with CHRIST's help, say over and over again, "It can be done, it has been done and will be done again."

Your happy sister, Mrs. Scott Lawrence."

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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